



County Medical Examiner's Office undergoes name change

By Peggy O'Hare
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The Harris County Medical Examiner's Office now has a new name, thanks to its advances in forensic sciences.

The office will now be known as the Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences. The county's Commissioners Court unanimously approved the name change Tuesday as part of the county's budget and policy issues package.

The name change, which takes effect immediately, was sought because of the office's expansion into fully accredited forensic sciences and crime laboratory services over the past seven years, said Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Luis Sanchez. He wanted a name that would accurately reflect the office's range of services because of a common misconception that the office only performs autopsies and determines cause and manner of deaths, he said.

"We have become fully accredited and one of the most respected forensic science centers in the nation," Sanchez wrote in a letter to Commissioners Court requesting the name change last fall. "With the support of the Texas Medical Center, we have established an academically oriented forensic center and created unique learning opportunities."

Center to keep name

The name change will not interfere with Sanchez's or the office's statutory duties, and all current job titles and positions will remain the same. The costs to the county will be minimal, Sanchez said. The agency's existing building at 1885 Old Spanish Trail will continue to be known as the "Joseph A. Jachimczyk Forensic Center" in honor of the county's first medical examiner.

The office's pathology services include anthropology, neuropathology, forensic imaging, postmortem toxicology, histology and morgue duties. Its crime lab services offer the four forensic disciplines — drug testing, forensic toxicology, trace evidence such as gunshot residue and fire debris analysis, and biology services such as serology and DNA testing.